

POKER GAME METHOD AND PLAYING AREA**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

- 5 The present invention relates to a method and playing area for a poker game.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are countless versions of poker, but one of the most popular poker games is "Texas Hold'em". This version starts with each player being dealt two cards face down. A first betting round follows the deal of the two face down cards. In the betting round, a player may pass or may make the initial bet. Once a bet has been made by a player, other players may call the bet, raise the bet, or fold the hand. The betting continues until there are no further raises, and all players have either called the last bet or folded. Next, three community cards are dealt face down ward and turned faced up simultaneously. Community cards are cards which may be concurrently used by any and all players. The players again evaluate their hands, each player using their two face down cards, together with the three community cards. A second betting round follows. Next, a fourth community card is dealt face up, followed by a third betting round. Finally, a fifth community card is dealt face up, followed by a fourth betting round. The hands of all remaining players (that is, those players who did not fold in any of the betting rounds) are ranked. The winner is the player who achieves the highest hand according to standard poker rankings. The winner then takes the pot.

25 A major drawback of versions of poker such as Texas Hold'em is that each hand can take a considerable amount of time, given the number of betting rounds and the time taken up by gamesmanship by players, such as bluffing, attempting to "read" other players, and so on. The frequently slow moving nature of poker games such as Texas Hold'em is generally undesirable because it diminishes the attention, visual interest and entertainment of players and spectators. Slow turnaround times per hand significantly decrease audience interest in viewing games played at poker tournaments. In addition, slow turnaround times per hand

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limit the profit margins of commercial gaming establishments because the house must collect a percentage of the pot to make a profit.

A need therefore exists for a method of playing a poker game and poker playing area in
5 which the turnaround time per hand is shortened to thereby increase visual interest and improve profit margins.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

- 10 According to the present invention, there is provided a method of playing a poker game including the steps of:
; dealing hands to players;
 during one or more betting rounds, requiring each player to check, call, raise or fold within a predetermined time;
15 for each player, indicating incremental elapsing of at least a portion of the predetermined time;
 if a player does not check, call, raise or fold within the predetermined time:
 declaring the player's hand dead if no bet exists in the betting round; or
 holding the player to a check if a bet exists in the betting round;
20 after all betting rounds are completed, determining betting by ranking remaining hands.

The present invention also provides a playing area for a poker game including:

- 25 at least one dealer station, a plurality of player stations and a corresponding plurality of pathways, each pathway extending from a central portion of the playing area towards a player station;
 wherein each pathway includes a plurality of consecutive elements that individually indicate incremental elapsing of at least a portion of a predetermined time in which each player is required to check, call, raise or fold during one or more betting rounds of the
30 poker game.

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Preferably, the poker game is Texas Hold'em such that the poker game includes four betting rounds.

The predetermined time is preferably less than 60 seconds. More preferably, the
5 predetermined time is up to or around 15 seconds and the elapsing of the last 10 seconds
are indicated in increments of seconds.

Preferably, incremental elapsing of at least a portion of the predetermined time for
individual players is indicated by audible counting and/or a plurality of lights, wherein
10 each light corresponds to a time increment. Preferably, the lights are coloured light-emitting
diodes (LEDs).

The playing area preferably further includes a clock for determining the predetermined
time.

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The playing area is preferably included in a gaming table or represented in a video format
for a video representation of a poker game. The video format may be displayed in a video
broadcast. Alternatively, the video format may be displayed by a computer or over a
network of computers.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

An embodiment of the present invention will now be described solely by way of non-limiting example and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

25 Figure 1 is a flow diagram of a method of playing a poker game, consistent with an
embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 2 is a schematic view of a playing area for a poker game of an embodiment
of the present invention.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENT

In the description only those parts are described which are necessary to understand the invention. The rules of the embodiment of a method of playing a poker game according to 5 the present invention, such as card decks, dealing order, antes or blinds, play direction, together with the ranking of hands, may all be assumed to those be of a conventional version of Texas Hold'em poker. However, the method and related playing area of the present invention are clearly applicable to any and all other versions of poker that involve one or more betting rounds.

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Figure 1 is a flow diagram illustrating the general flow of a method 100 of playing Texas Hold'em poker consistent with an embodiment of the present invention. Although described serially, the flow points and method steps of the method 200 can be performed by separate elements in conjunction or in parallel, whether asynchronously or 15 synchronously, in a pipelined manner, or otherwise. In the context of the invention, there is no particular requirement that the method must be performed in the same order in which this description lists flow points or method steps, except where explicitly so stated.

The method 100 begins at step 102, during which each player antes. At step 104, each 20 player receives a hand from the dealer consisting of two cards face down. At step 106, there is a first betting round. At step 108, three community cards are dealt face down ward and turned faced up simultaneously (the "flop"). Community cards are cards which may be concurrently used by any and all players. At step 110, there is a second betting round. At step 112, a fourth community card is dealt, face up, on the table (the "turn"). At step 25 114, there is a third betting round. At step 116, a fifth community card is dealt, face up, on the table (the "river"). At step 118, there is a fourth and final betting round.

During each of the four betting rounds at steps 106, 110, 114, 118, each player is given an opportunity to take at least one of four actions within 15 seconds. The initial player can 30 either check, bet, or fold. Checking is when the player wishes to continue playing with his hand, but does not wish to bet anything additional. Folding is when the player no longer

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wishes to continue playing with his hand by giving up any ante he has made to the pot. A player who has folded will no longer receive cards. Betting is placing a certain wager amount into the pot and thereby allowing the player to continue with his hand and also requiring other players to call, raise, or fold. Calling is when a player wishes to continue
5 with his hand by matching the outstanding bet. Raising is when a player wishes to continue with his hand by exceeding the outstanding bet, so that all other players must at least match the new outstanding bet to continue playing. When there is no bet in existence, a player can check which means that they are not going to put any more wagers in but they will continue to hold onto their hand. If there is a bet, players cannot check. They must at
10 least call the bet, or else they can fold their hand. In a betting round, this procedure continues until every player has had a chance to act.

The 15-second time limit in which a player must act during each betting round is applied by the dealer starting from when the player's turn starts and the action is "on a player".
15 After 5 seconds, the dealer calls "time" and starts a 10-second clock. Thereafter, the player has 10 seconds in which to act. The dealer and/or clock counting assistants (or "clock girls") count down the final 5 seconds. In addition, LEDs automatically and incrementally illuminate towards the player during the final 10 seconds, thereby visually indicating the remaining amount of time to act. This feature of the playing area is described below in
20 further detail by reference to Figure 2. If the player does not act before the expiry of the 15 seconds, they are either held to a check if no bet exists in the betting round, or their hand is declared dead if a bet already exists.

25 The betting structure of the embodiment is as follows. The game is played "pot limit" before the flop, and "no limit" post flop (including "turn" and "river"). "Pot limit" means that the maximum size of any bet or raise is limited to the sum of the antes, blinds and called wager in the pot. "No limit" means no constraint is placed on the maximum size of any bet or raise. In pot limit or no limit, when raising, a player must either put the amount of the raise out in one motion or state the raise amount. By stating the word raise, a player
30 protects his right to raise, but the raise must be made in one additional motion unless he states the amount. If the amount of a bet or raise is not clearly visible, the dealer will

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- endeavour to announce the amount, however if a player wishes to have a bet cut down and counted they shall ask the dealer "how much"? All large and unquantifiable bets will be cut down by the dealer as soon as they are pushed forward. Alternatively, once the bet has been announced, the dealer will then start the 15 second time limit process. If the clock
- 5 has been started the dealer will have it stopped, count the bet, announce the amount and call "time" again and the clock will be re-started. Players may be advised that if they continuously abuse the privilege of having the clock stopped, they may be denied that privilege. In a tournament of games, all players in the tournament will receive at least one emergency timeout button which may be used during the tournament. When the action is
- 10 on a player and time is running out, they may elect to push their timeout button into the betting play. The dealer will collect this button and allow the time to run out, and then recommence the time clock. This means a player will get a single "15 seconds" extra to make their decision.
- 15 After completing the four betting rounds at steps 106, 110, 114, 118, the method 100 proceeds with step 120 during which the hands of all remaining players (that is, those players who did not fold, or have their hands declared dead, in any of the betting rounds) are turned face up on the table, and the winner between each player is determined by ranking the best hands of each player individually according to one of the standard
- 20 rankings of poker hands. At step 122, the pot is then divided between one or more winning players. If two or more players choose to play again, play resumes at step 102.

Referring to Figure 2, an embodiment of a playing area 200 for a poker game includes two dealer stations 202, 204 and six player stations 206, 208, 210, 212, 214, 216. In the

25 illustrated embodiment, the playing area 200 is implemented as a game table. However, it will be appreciated that the playing area may be alternatively implemented as a video format for a video broadcast, or a standalone or online video game. The dealer stations 202, 204 accommodate two dealers (not shown), one of which is a main dealer who deals the cards and the other is an assistant dealer who shuffles cards and assists the main dealer

30 to manage the game. Thus, one dealer runs the game, while the other dealer is responsible for shuffling the secondary deck and assisting the "main" dealer to sweep bets in and/or

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move a dealing button. Only the main dealer calls time and initiates the clock counting process.

The playing area 200 includes six pathways 218, 220, 222, 224, 226, 228, each of which 5 extends from a central portion of the playing area towards a respective player station 206, 208, 210, 212, 214, 216. Each pathway 218, 220, 222, 224, 226, 228 consists of 10 red coloured LEDs that individually and sequentially illuminate towards the player during the final 10 seconds of the 15 seconds in which each player must act during the betting rounds. When the playing area 200 is implemented as a game table, the 15-second clock may be 10 incorporated into the table so that it can be conveniently operated by the dealers. The playing area 200 also includes a community card station 230 for dealing the community cards.

The playing area 200 may be operated so that as soon as the action is on a player their 15 corresponding red "action" lights start lighting up towards them, thereby indicating the amount of time left before an action must be made. After one player has acted, the action lights of the next player in turn begin to light up and count down towards the player. In video formats such as video poker games, the player area 200 can further include a diffuse red spotlight that alternately shines on the players whose turn it is to act. In "Sit n Go" or 20 multi-table tournament video poker games, an electronic "emergency clock button" facility can be provided to players, as described above for live tournament games.

It will be appreciated that the embodiments described above are intended only to serve as examples, and that many other embodiments are possible with the spirit and the scope of 25 the present invention. For example, the method of the present invention is not limited to Texas Hold'em poker but may be used with any and all other versions of poker, or card games derived from poker, which have multiple betting rounds. Further, the advantageous shortening of turnaround time per hand can be achieved by varying the time limit for players to act may be vary from 15 seconds to other time periods in seconds or minutes.